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Module: ECIE6002

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Digital Skills Aren't Optional: How the DCF Helps Learners Thrive



Children using technology in the classroom (TechHub, 2021)

Let's face it—technology is everywhere, especially in schools. You only have to step into a classroom these days to see just how much digital life is woven into our daily routines. Pupils are googling answers to tricky questions, messaging friends before the bell rings, and creating content that sometimes leaves the adults in their lives feeling a little breathless. But here's the thing: just because young people are quick to swipe, tap, and scroll doesn't mean they automatically know how to spot fake news, stay safe online, or communicate kindly in the digital world.

That's exactly why the Digital Competence Framework (DCF) exists. Instead of leaving digital learning to chance, the DCF gives schools a clear, structured way to help pupils become not just enthusiastic users of devices, but skilled, thoughtful, and responsible digital citizens. Whether they're making videos, researching a new topic, or collaborating on a group project online, the DCF makes sure there's real purpose and progression behind every digital experience.

So, what is digital confidence, anyway?

It might be easy to assume “digital confidence” just means being able to open an app or type super quickly. But it’s about so much more than that. Digital confidence is really the ability to use technology thoughtfully, to create and evaluate content, and—perhaps most importantly—to stay safe and act ethically online (Welsh Government, 2025).

Digital competence is about:

- Judging what information is trustworthy (and what’s not)
- Understanding how your online behaviour affects others
- Sharing your ideas clearly using digital tools
- Solving problems with logic and data
- Recognising how digital systems shape the world we live in

Rennie and Smyth (2020) even describe digital literacy as a cultural skill—a way of contributing to modern life, not just accessing it. Meanwhile, Prensky (2001) reminds us that even kids who’ve grown up surrounded by technology don’t automatically have the skills to use it critically. As tempting as it is to call the younger generation “digital natives,” snapping a selfie doesn’t mean they understand privacy settings or can spot bias in online content.

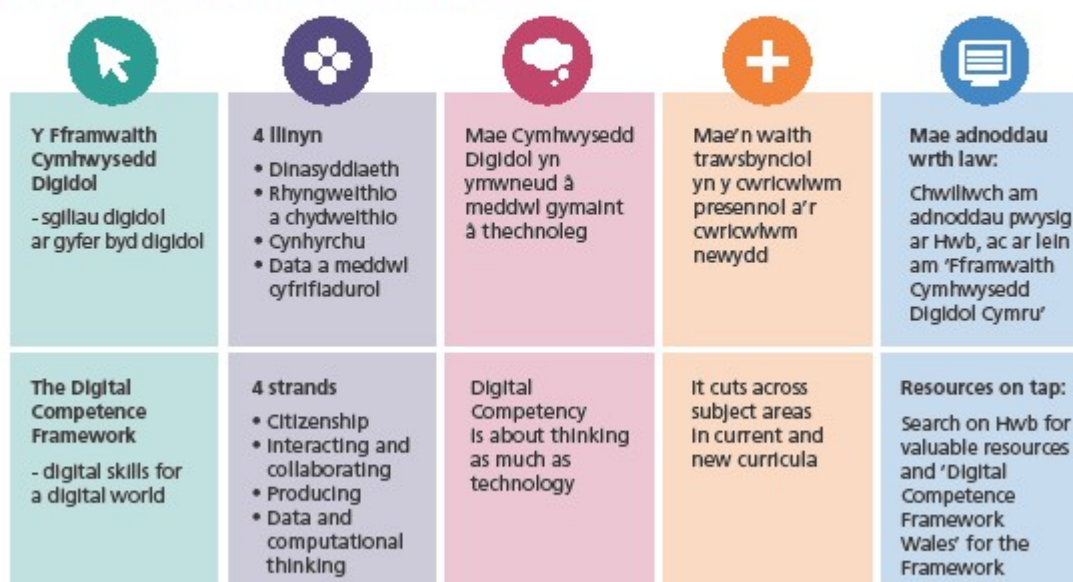
Where does the DCF fit into the Curriculum for Wales?

The DCF doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It’s designed to support the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, helping learners become capable, creative, and responsible users of technology (Welsh Government, 2021). The framework is built around four main strands:

- Citizenship – respectful participation online, understanding rights and responsibilities
- Interacting and collaborating – teamwork using digital platforms, learning to work together effectively
- Producing – creating digital content for real audiences, not just for the sake of it
- Data and computational thinking – using information and logic to tackle challenges and solve problems

These strands aren't just tick boxes. They progress through five steps, giving learners the chance to build their skills gradually, from early exploration right through to independent mastery. It's all about developing confidence and capability, every step of the way.

Y Fframwaith Cymhwysedd Digidol Digital Competence Framework



Gwefan/Website: www.llyw.cymru/cwricwlwmigymru www.gov.wales/curriculumforwales

Example of the DCF strands (Welsh Government, 2018)

What does digital learning actually look like in classrooms?

The DCF works best when it's woven into everyday teaching. It's not about having a single "ICT lesson" once a week; it's about making digital skills a natural part of learning, whatever the subject. Here are some ways it comes to life in classrooms:

- Developing responsible digital citizens: Pupils explore what personal data is, how digital footprints work, and why online actions can have real-world consequences. They learn early on that how you behave online matters just as much as how you act offline.
- Collaborative learning: Learners co-create documents, share feedback instantly, and manage group projects using digital tools. They get to practise clear communication and learn how to make group decisions—sometimes easier said than done!

- Producing with purpose: Forget traditional posters. Today's pupils are making podcasts, videos, blogs, and animations. They're learning to communicate clearly and creatively with an audience that goes beyond the classroom walls.
- Problem-solving with data and code: Coding isn't just for computer scientists. Pupils write simple programs, work with spreadsheets, collect data, and use logic to spot patterns. It's about building resilience and problem-solving skills that will serve them for life.

Estyn (2023) has found that learners really do make progress when digital learning is embedded consistently. Younger pupils might be confidently coding robots to follow routes around the classroom, while older students work more independently with data and multimedia projects.



*Children coding using Lego WeDo2.0
(Robot Advance, n.d)*

But let's be real—there are challenges, too.

Not every teacher feels like a tech whizz, and not every school has the same resources. Some staff are super comfortable with digital tools, while others might feel a little out of their depth. And of course, not every pupil has reliable access to devices or Wi-Fi at

home. These aren't small issues. If we're not careful, digital approaches could actually make inequalities worse, not better (Estyn, 2023).

So, what helps? Professional learning for teachers, device loan schemes, and supportive digital policies are all vital. But digital competence isn't built in a single session or after one workshop—it takes time, consistency, and plenty of practice.



The digital divide (Education Magazine, n.d)

Why does the DCF really matter?

Here's the bottom line: digital competence is a life skill. It's not just a "nice to have"—it's essential. The DCF helps learners:

- Evaluate information instead of believing everything they read
- Communicate in ways that make sense to real audiences
- Collaborate and problem-solve using technology
- Act responsibly and ethically online

These aren't just tech skills—they're skills for education, for work, and for everyday life. Learners who can question sources, manage their digital identities, and make confident, informed decisions online are better equipped for whatever comes next. The DCF doesn't just make pupils "tech savvy"—it helps build digital citizens.

Conclusion

The Digital Competence Framework gives Welsh schools a practical roadmap for developing meaningful digital capability. When it's embedded thoughtfully, it helps learners become confident, creative, and critical users of technology. Digital life isn't slowing down, and digital competence can't be left to chance. As technology continues to shape the world around us, the DCF ensures every learner has a fair shot at building the skills they need—not just for tomorrow, but for today.

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Growing Up Digital: Helping Children Make Sense of Online Life



Young child using a smartphone (McCarthy, C. 2017)

Scroll long enough on any device, and you'll see children weaving between videos, games and group chats without hesitation. For today's learners, digital life is part of how they communicate, learn and socialise – not something they access occasionally. This brings significant opportunities for creativity and connection, but also challenges that require support from schools, families, and policymakers.

Children and young people (CYP) today are growing up in a world where being online is entirely normal. Messaging friends, watching videos, gaming, learning, creating and sharing content all happen through digital spaces. For many CYP, the digital world is not separate from “real life” - it is part of everyday experience.

This reality often raises concerns. Is it the digital world supporting children's learning and wellbeing, or placing them at risk? As with most complex issues, the answer is not one or the other.

A more helpful question is:

How do we help children and young people understand, navigate and use the digital world in ways that are safe, meaningful and empowering?

Digital Opportunities in Childhood

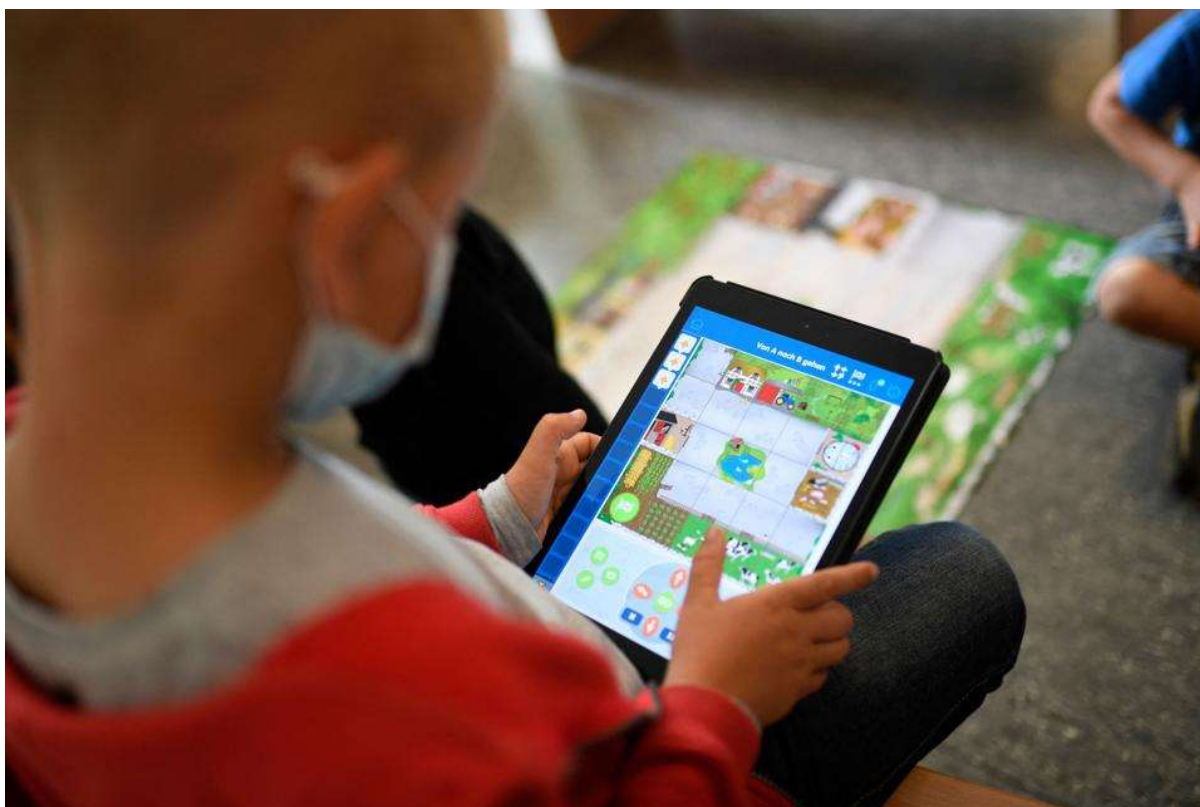
Digital spaces now function as both playgrounds and classrooms. Children use technology to explore interests, revisit tricky concepts and express themselves in ways traditional activities don't always allow. Online tutorials, educational videos, and games provide learners with consistent opportunities to build knowledge and practice independently (Livingstone and Stoilova, 2019). Digital communication also supports friendships and a sense of belonging; whether through messaging apps or group gaming, learners stay connected beyond school hours. Instead of replacing face-to-face interaction, digital spaces often extend it.

Digital technologies offer significant opportunities for CYP, particularly in relation to learning, connection and participation.

Some of the most important benefits include:

- **Access to learning and information**, allowing CYP to explore interests, revisit concepts and learn independently across multiple platforms (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2019).
- **Social connection and belonging**, especially as online communication increasingly complement face-to-face relationships during adolescence.
- **Creativity and self-expression**, as CYP create videos, digital art, blogs, music and games, developing both technical and creative skills (Shapiro, 2019)

From a learning perspective, digital environments support knowledge-building through networks rather than single sources. Children are constantly forming connections between ideas, platforms and people. This raises an important question: *are CYP being taught how to evaluate what information is useful, accurate and trustworthy?*



Child using Minecraft Education at home (Rich, J., 2022)

Challenges and Risks in the Digital World

Alongside these opportunities, there are well-documented risks that affect CYP in different ways.

Key challenges include:

- **Online bullying and harassment**, which can feel constant and difficult to escape due to the always-on nature of digital communication (Staksrud et al., 2013).
- **Exposure to harmful or inappropriate content**, including violence, pornography and self-harm material, often encountered unintentionally.
- **Commercial and social pressure**, particularly through influencer culture, targeted advertising and social comparison, which can affect self-esteem and wellbeing (OECD, 2021).

Another issue is digital inequality. Differences in access to devices, internet connectivity and adult support mean that not all children benefit equally from digital opportunities. This can reinforce existing social inequalities rather than reduce them (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2019)

This leads to a key question: ***How can children develop confidence and resilience online if their access and support are uneven to begin with?***



Example of cyber bullying (Kids Helpline, 2018)

Understanding Digital Impact Through Theory

The impact of the digital world on CYP can be better understood through learning and communication theories developed for digital contexts.

Communication-focused theories highlight how technology shapes interaction itself, not just the messages being shared. Online environments increase visibility, speed and reach, amplifying both positive and negative experiences. For CYP, this means friendships, conflicts and identities can feel more intense and more public.

Learning theories associated with digital environments emphasise that knowledge is distributed across networks. Learning involves making connections, recognising patterns and adapting understanding as new information emerges. This places digital literacy and critical thinking at the centre of learning rather than treating them as optional skills (Siemens, 2005). This raises an important consideration: *if children are constantly navigating digital networks, are they being supported to do so thoughtfully and carefully?*

Children as Digital Consumers and Producers

Children engage with the digital world in two key ways: as **consumers** and as **producers** of digital content.

As consumers, CYP regularly interact with videos, posts, adverts and online communities. Supporting them involves helping them to:

- Question who created content and why
- Recognise persuasion, bias and misinformation
- Reflect on how online content affects their emotions and beliefs

As producers, CYP share their own content through comments, images, videos and messages. This brings responsibility. Teaching in this area focuses on:

- Protecting personal data and privacy
- Understanding consent and respectful communication
- Recognising that digital footprints can be long-lasting

These skills help CYP see themselves as active participants in the digital world rather than passive users, aligning with broader aims of digital citizenship education (Welsh Government, 2016)



(Climico, C. 2024)

Supporting Children Through Policy and Practice

Supporting CYP in the digital world requires a shared approach involving policy, education and families.

At a national level, legislation and statutory guidance in Wales places increasing responsibility on online platforms, schools and safeguarding partners to reduce risks for children, particularly in relation to harmful content and age-appropriate access. This reflects a shift away from expecting CYP to manage online risks independently, and

towards a shared safeguarding approach involving education, regulation and professional responsibility (Welsh Government, 2021)

In education, digital competence and online safety are recognised as essential life skills. In Wales, the Digital Competence Framework embeds digital skills across the curriculum, focusing on ethical participation, critical thinking and responsible use of technology (Welsh Government, 2016).

Alongside schools, organisations focused on child protection and online safety provide guidance, resources and training to support CYP, parents and professionals.



Parent supporting child online (Masters in Data Science, 2025)

Bringing It All Together

The digital world is now a core part of childhood. It offers opportunities for learning, connection and creativity, while also introducing risks linked to safety, influence and inequality.

The challenge is not to remove children from digital spaces, but to support them within them. This means:

- Developing strong digital literacy and critical thinking skills
- Promoting resilience and confidence online
- Ensuring equitable access and support
- Encouraging open, informed conversations about online life.

Perhaps the most important question to keep asking is this:

Are we helping children simply stay safe online – or are we helping them thrive as confident, ethical digital citizens?

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Tech Isn't the Teacher: Why Digital Learning Works Best When People Lead the Way



Children using ICT in the classroom (Strategy Education, 2025)

Walk into almost any primary classroom in Wales today and you'll see technology woven into everyday routines. Learners quiz online, revisit lessons through videos, practice spelling on apps and pull together presentations with ease. Digital learning feels ordinary now – a far cry from booking the ICT suite once a fortnight and hoping the computers behaved.

But here's the thing: technology alone doesn't guarantee progress. Digital tools open doors, but learners only walk through confidently when teaching, support and access come together.

This post explores the benefits of digital learning, its impact on learners and staff, the barriers to inclusion and why teachers remain at the heart of meaningful digital practice.

Confidence Grows When Tech Lowers the Pressure

For many learners, digital tools reduce the fear of getting things wrong. Activities can be repeated privately, feedback is instant, and mistakes don't have to be made in front of peers. This freedom to try again builds self-belief – something Bandura (1997) connects directly to motivation.

Digital features also help reluctant learners take intellectual risks. A pupil who shies away from handwriting may use speech-to-text to express ideas; another might practice reading fluency by recording themselves before sharing with the teacher. Small moments like these can transform “*I can't*” into “*I'll give it a go.*”



Child using speech-to-text software (Reading Rockets, n.d)

If technology gives pupils the confidence to attempt what once felt impossible, shouldn't we pay close attention to what that says about the environment they need to thrive?

When Technology Adapts, Personalisation Takes Shape

Adaptive platforms adjust the level of challenge according to learner performance, helping pupils move forward at a pace that suits them. Cheung and Salvin (2013) found that when paired with strong teaching, these personalised approaches can support reading achievement.

Teachers also gain insight from the data digital tasks generate. They can spot misconceptions earlier, plan targeted interventions and monitor growth. But here's a crucial question: what can't data tell us? A high quiz score may signal surface-level recall rather than deep understanding. Data informs teacher judgement, but it never replaces it. If technology sharpens insights, shouldn't teaching sharpen the response?

Inclusion Is More Than a Device in Every Bag

Digital learning can widen access to the curriculum by offering multiple routes into understanding. Learners developing English as an additional language benefit from visuals and audio prompts; anxious pupils can respond privately; those who need repetition can revisit tasks without stigma. Piavio's dual coding theory (1986) explains why combining visual and verbal information strengthens memory and understanding.

But inclusion needs more than options – it needs access. Some pupils can practice at home, while others rely entirely on school provision. Welsh Government (2020) highlights that digital inequality continues to disadvantage learners.

So we must ask: if access is unequal, can digital learning ever be truly inclusive?

To make digital learning genuinely inclusive, schools need:

- Reliable access to devices and connectivity
- Structured digital time in school
- Support for families to navigate digital tools
- Space for learners to build confidence gradually

Ultimately, inclusion is shaped by access, time and support – not technology alone.



Learners sharing digital equipment (Children's Rights and You, 2025)

Teachers Make Digital Learning Meaningful

Digital platforms don't form relationships, recognise frustration in a learner's expression, or know when to pause and discuss — teachers do. The most meaningful

digital practice comes from staff who feel empowered to experiment, evaluate and adapt.

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) emphasises that autonomy, competence and relatedness underpin motivation. If teachers feel trusted, confident and supported, doesn't the quality of digital learning naturally follow?

Digital data might spotlight gaps, but who interprets that spotlight?

Teachers notice what metrics can't: growing curiosity, subtle confidence, the smile that follows "I did it myself."

So perhaps the real question is: what happens when teachers feel sidelined by technology — and what happens when they lead it instead?

Technology Isn't a Shortcut to Progress

There's a temptation to believe technology automatically modernises learning. But tablets don't guarantee deeper thinking, and platforms don't transform understanding on their own. While apps can deliver content efficiently, genuine understanding grows through dialogue, collaboration and human curiosity.

So we must keep asking: what can technology *not* do?

- Spark spontaneous debate
- Offer emotional encouragement at the right time
- Build shared reasoning through conversation
- Recognise when curiosity takes the lesson somewhere new

If deep understanding grows through dialogue and collaboration, isn't it clear that digital tools work best as scaffolding rather than substitutes?



Teacher explaining to learners (Fresno Pacific University, 2021)

When Inclusion Fails, Gaps Widen

Unequal access to devices and broadband means some pupils extend learning at home while others can't. Without careful planning, digital expectations risk widening the attainment gap. If homework assumes every learner can log in — are we unintentionally rewarding circumstance rather than effort?

Access alone still isn't enough. Families need confidence navigating digital tasks. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital reminds us that familiarity with education advantages some learners — and now digital literacy has become another form of capital.

And what about staff? If teachers don't feel confident using digital tools, how can pupils benefit?

This leaves us with an uncomfortable but necessary question: are we using digital tools because they improve learning, or because they are simply available?

Removing Barriers: Planning Beyond the Screen

To make digital learning genuinely inclusive, schools can:

- support equitable access through loan schemes and realistic homework expectations
- teach digital skills explicitly rather than assuming “digital nativism”
- invest meaningfully in staff professional learning
- blend digital methods with rich classroom practice
- develop family partnerships to build confidence at home

If we know technology is most effective when paired with high-quality pedagogy (Cheung & Slavin, 2013), why would we ever separate the two?

Final Reflections: People First, Technology Second

Digital learning expands what’s possible. It boosts confidence, supports personalisation and offers multiple routes into understanding. But the strongest impact still comes from the people who guide, encourage and challenge learners.

From experience, digital learning works best when it is:

- Purposeful
- Blended
- Equitable
- Learner-centred
- Rooted in relationships

Devices can brighten the path – but teachers help learners walk it. And if technology works best when it empowers practitioners rather than replaces them, shouldn’t that shape every decision we make?

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Reading Eggs: Digital Magic or Just Glitter?



Reading Eggs welcome page (Reading Eggs, 2026)

If you work in a primary school in Wales, chances are you will have heard the excited whisper: “Are we going on Reading Eggs today?”

And honestly, I get it. Reading eggs is colourful, noisy, full of rewards and very good at making phonics feel like playtime. But behind the glittery eggs and dancing letters, an important question remains:

Does Reading Eggs genuinely support the learners who need the most help?

In this blog, I reflect on a small group of Year 3 learners in my class: pupils with phonological processing difficulties, and those with low confidence and socio-emotional barriers to reading. I aim to explore how well Reading Eggs met their needs, and how it fits within Welsh priorities like the Curriculum for Wales and the Digital Competence Framework (DCF)

What /S Reading Eggs, Really?

Created by Blake eLearning, Reading Eggs is a digital learning platform aimed at 3–13-year-olds. It mixes phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and digital books with games, quizzes and instant rewards. The programme adapts to each learner, gives immediate feedback and tracks progress.

Essentially, it is literacy learning gamified, phonics wrapped in animation – which is exactly the kind of digital play Shapiro (2019) says today’s children learn best through.

Meet the Learners Behind the Screen

The group included:

- Learners with phonological processing difficulties
- Pupils with low confidence and high reading anxiety
- An EAL pupil developing early English
- Mixed socio-economic backgrounds, meaning very different home access to devices.

The learners needed reassurance, repetition and an environment where mistakes felt safe – basically the psychological safety Maslow describes in his Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Without that sense of security and belonging, higher-level learning (like reading fluently or tackling new vocabulary) becomes much harder to achieve.

How Reading Eggs Supported Them

Right level, right time – Vygotsky would approve

Learners complete a placement test and are matched to a suitable level. This avoids overwhelming them and supports gradual progression – exactly what Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ref) recommends.

Visual & Audio = better learning for EAL

Reading Eggs highlights text, reads instructions aloud, and uses animations to reinforce meaning. Paivio’s Dual Coding Theory explains why this works: combining visuals and spoken language helps learners understand and remember.

Confidence boosts through rewards

Eggs, badges, praise – yes, it’s very behaviourist, and Skinner would definitely recognise it. But for children who believe they “can’t read”, the instant positive feedback did wonders for confidence and perseverance.

Data teachers can actually use

Lesson completion, quiz scores and reading ages helped me track progress and plan interventions. It gave a clearer picture than worksheets ever could.

What I Actually Saw in the Classroom

Here's the honest impact:

- **Engagement soared**—even reluctant readers asked to “go on Reading Eggs.”
- **Confidence improved**—visible smiles, willingness to try, and far fewer “I can’t” moments.
- **Phonemic awareness grew**—decoding became quicker and more accurate.
- **EAL learning accelerated**—the combination of visuals and audio boosted comprehension.

These findings align with Cheung & Slavin’s (2013) research showing that edtech can boost reading progress when paired with good teaching.

But I also noticed something else: **the biggest improvements happened when Reading Eggs was blended with live teaching**, small-group phonics, and lots of real reading.

Does Reading Eggs Support Welsh Policy?

The Curriculum for Wales – yes, in several ways

Reading Eggs helps develop:

- **Ambitious, capable learners**, through personalised challenges
- **Enterprising, creative contributors**, as they problem-solve digitally
- **Healthy, confident individuals**, thanks to encouraging, low-pressure tasks

Digital Competence Framework – definitely

Pupils build:

- digital navigation skills
- confidence with multimedia
- early online safety awareness

These are foundational skills for modern learners.

The attainment gap – complicated

Adaptive tools can close literacy gaps.

But only if **all** learners can access them.

Without equitable access, gaps widen instead of shrinking.

This is the area that demands the most conscious planning from schools.

Thinking With Shapiro: Digital Childhood Is the New Normal

Shapiro (2019) argues that digital learning isn't replacing real childhood—it *is* childhood now. Children think and play digitally, so digital reading tools make sense.

He also reminds us that digital learning works best **alongside human connection**, not instead of it. This perfectly matches what I saw: Reading Eggs supported learning, but teacher interaction brought meaning, emotion and depth.

Questions I'm Still Reflecting On

- How can we guide children from reading *for rewards* to reading *for enjoyment*?
- How do schools ensure digital fairness in a Welsh context?
- Which learners thrive on Reading Eggs—and who needs something more specialised?
- How do digital tools and human teaching complement, rather than compete with, each other?

My Verdict: A Helpful Tool—If Used Thoughtfully

Reading Eggs is fun, motivating, and effective for many early readers. It builds confidence, supports phonics, and fits well with both the Curriculum for Wales and the DCF.

But it's not a magic fix. It must be:

- blended with high-quality phonics teaching
- used equitably
- monitored to prevent over-reliance on rewards

When used carefully, Reading Eggs becomes a powerful bridge—helping hesitant readers step into literacy with more joy, more confidence, and more digital fluency.

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